

Side

Brown

I've spent so much time in front of computers this week I feel like I'm going to melt into the plastic any second. I should've started this article hours, no days ago and fully intended to, but work, no money, no, maybe both called and I can't see the letters, let alone type. The thing about these movable computer keyboards is that if you sit down at the desk in just a slightly different position and don't look at what you're doing, you can type entire paragraphs in Martian before you notice. I mean, I got up early today, so early that I beat everyone else into the office, I mean Derek was shocked to find I was already there, and then before I knew it the office filled up with people, wives, interns, artists being interviewed and in the middle of that comes a guy to change the light fixtures, not to mention the publisher who wants to have a meeting (!) and it's deadline time. Well, not really. But close enough. So here, I am, Friday night, and I want to get this done so I can have a weekend, and maybe a life.

Somehow all this chaos put me in the perfect state of mind to listen to **Robyn Hitchcock** who plays the Keswick in Glenside, Friday with his band the Egyptians with **Murray Attaway** opening, but I'll get to him later. So, I was all ready for Hitchcock's latest album *Respect* (A&M) to be another weird record of inscrutably clever tunes that make you sit for hours trying to figure out what they mean. Actually, I never sit around trying to figure out what Robyn Hitchcock's songs are about. Either I like them or I don't. Usually he has one or two songs that I really like, and then I forget about them along with the rest of the album. Like I really liked "Madonna of the Wasps." Played that one a lot. But on this new album, Hitchcock decided not to be so clever though he still sings in that oh-so-English accent. At least it comes naturally to him. Anyway, this album starts off typically weird with "The Yip Song," which I initially thought was loud and obnoxious, but liked it about the third time around. I tried to read the lyrics in typically minuscule CD booklet type, but computers have robbed me of my ability to see. Hitchcock follows that with an absolutely beautiful and sad pop ballad, "Arms of Love." I can't remember the next two songs, so maybe they weren't any good, but "When I Was Dead," caught my attention and even has a bag pipe or something that sounds like one. (I'd read the credits, but like I said everything's blurred right now.) He gets fairly catchy with "Driving Aloud (Radio Song)", and "Serpent At the Gates of Wisdom" starts with a Dylan harmonica (so I immediately liked it) and a Dylan-styled acoustic guitar strum, leads into majestic country piano and Band-type organ, but making it even better is that Hitchcock sings it like he means it.

Also quite decent is "Then You're Dust," which has great spooky electric bass, and even spookier guitar, and Hitchcock sings in an almost falsetto, hitting you with a surprise ending, before wandering into the fairly insane and quite hysterical sort of rap, "Wafflehead."

So, yeah, go see Robyn Hitchcock. He puts on good, non-idiotic, intelligent shows. He's also quite funny. His band the Egyptians are also quite good-- they're playing on *Respect* is excellent. And to quote my friend Chuck (who always gets good-naturedly bugged when I don't credit him), "100,000 college kids can't be wrong."

Opening is Murray Attaway who used to be in Guadacanal Diary who were one of those '80s melodic pop bands who everybody told me I should like, like my ex-roommate who always talked in a loud guttural rumble and said things like, "Guadacanal Diary, they're *cool*." Well, they were all right,

but I saw them a couple of times at the Cabaret and by the tenth song, I'd be asking myself what am I doing here? (It just occurred to me that I may be mixing them up with the Connells, but it really doesn't matter.) Anyway, Attaway's first solo album *In Thrall* (DGC) came out a couple of months ago and I listened to it briefly then and I'm listening to it more extensively now and it's better now. I'm already on the fourth song, (actually I played the first three songs a few times cause the phone rang and the pizza man came (all at once of course) and they've all been pretty good. That fourth song, "Angels in the Trees," had great loopy violin by David Mansfield and Attaway sings in a high melodic voice something like Michael Stipe, except Attaway makes sure you can understand the words (which Stipe does now too) and now I'm on the fifth song, "Living in Another Time," which may even be better than the other four.

But wait -- just what does better mean? (I better go open the window and stare at the sign on the PECO building and think about this.) Okay, I'm back. Who wants to know what PECO's saying anyway? I decided I don't know what better means. I could look it up but I can't see words anymore. (I just realized I was getting hypnotized by the computer screen and had to start typing again.) Look, it's like this, when I listen to a CD, I'm looking for a song I want to sing. I'm looking to be moved. I wanna hear a song that I want to play again and again. I mean I'm in my 14th hour of looking at words propelled by a couple of doses of sinus medicine, four cups of coffee and all kinds of foreign food the doctors don't want me to eat, and I fully intend to go out and see a band and drink tonight.

I could care less what Attaway's singing about. I'm sure the lyrics are good, but all I care about is whether I hear that special something in his voice that tells me he means it and feels it. And not only that, I wanna know that the musicians playing with him have that spark that makes it real. Right now, on "August Rain," the guitar players, Jon Brien and Robbie Blunt have that spark, and a nasty sound too.

So yeah, that special meaningful feel is there on every song on this album, and not only that, the musicians have that funky feel that puts an edge on every song, leaving the all-important impression that they weren't just playing another session, they were inspired.

If Murray Attaway plays and sings like he does on this album, you won't be wondering why you're there on the tenth song. And that's all you really need to know.

Saturday, it will absolutely be worth the trip to the Ambler Cabaret to see the **Charmaine Neville Band**, who have a fantastic album *It's About Time* (Gert Town). The daughter of Art (of the Neville Brothers), Charmaine can sing like nobody's business and her band smokes, charging from R and B into wild jazz improvisations on "Rocket V," and into a Caribbean romp in "Leave Room for the Dancers."

Her band includes keyboardist/singer/songwriter Amasa Miller who backed Aaron Neville a couple of years back at the Jambalaya Jam, and sax legend Reggie Houston.

Not a group to leave a musical style untouched, they more than pull of a soul ballad, "Everybody Needs a Good Song," with terrific Gospel harmonies, then whip into Louis Jordan's "Saturday Night Fish Fry," and Sonny Rollins' "Don't Stop the Carnival," before dipping into a lowdown blues, "Barbecue Boss."

Neville makes every song come alive singing with incredible range and

vitality. This is everything New Orleans music should be about.